

## The Art of Kimchi Making

Ever since I was a child, I would enjoy the pickled taste of the kimchi in my mouth, usually with a spoonful of rice or Doenjang Jjigae. I would eat different variations of kimchi: kkakdugi (radish kimchi), kkaennip (pickled perilla leaves), and Oi Sobagi (cucumber kimchi). It was a favorite side dish, a star player on my family's dinner table; however, an unwelcome player at the school cafeteria. During that time, I was always scared of what other kids would think if I took kimchi to school again. My first experience was an unpleasant one, kids turned their head in disgust as I opened the lid that held a portion of kkaennip. My mom had packed what I called a traditional Korean lunch, one serving of rice, a hefty serving of soup, along with steamed egg and kimchi. I remember the whispering of the naive students around me and the red flush on my cheeks, hot from embarrassment. Ever since then, I strictly said, "Normal lunches only." My mom didn't know what I meant, she didn't think that other students would treat me in such a way just for packing my favorites.

I felt ashamed and childish for letting the opinions of other kids decide what I should eat. Furthermore, I wasn't showing off my aunt's brilliant kimchi. After all, she puts so much time and energy into making it for us.

I remember when I was younger, my aunt decided to make a huge batch of kimchi, enough so she could share with other relatives and her church people. My aunt was sitting on the floor, her legs extended out with a bowl the size of a small inflatable pool. She had washed napa cabbages (around 15), a large cylinder container of gochugaru, a bag of sugar, and heaps of salt, along with other ingredients, surrounding her. I felt overwhelmed being around so many ingredients, but my aunt was calm. She was careful but calm when breaking apart the cabbage, adding the ingredients one by one, and continuously mixing it well. She wasn't hesitant with her movements, confident in her experiences as a kimchi chef. Her eyebrows were knitted in concentration but she had a smile on her face. She was pleased knowing that she is making a dish her family will enjoy. She took her time, her eyes would flicker up at the Korean drama that was playing, but then focus her attention back on the kimchi. Every once and awhile, my aunt would let me taste her creation and tell her my opinion. I always thought it tasted balanced, not too sweet and not too salty. Plus, in order to have really good kimchi, you want to sit it out and let it ferment.

While I was watching her work at the kimchi, I felt guilty and ashamed for not being proud of my culture and the delicious foods. My life as a Korean-American, I am not just subjected to greasy burgers or heavily salted fries, but to a whole variety of flavors and cooking styles. I was grateful to have black-bean noodles, spicy rice cake, and bean sprout soup. I wanted so desperately to fit in so I had a peanut butter jelly sandwich or ham sandwich, but I always craved my aunt's Korean cooking. Kimchi (as well as a whole section of savory foods) is a part of my culture, a part that I am proud of and grateful for.